

A N *Theology vol 110.*
ARGUMENT

CONCERNING THE REASONABLENESS
AND NECESSITY

O F

*Margaret Green gave
her by V. H. H.*

Christian Revelation ;

Addressed chiefly to Persons of Quality,
and a liberal Education.

*Auctoritates contemnis, ratione pugnas: Patere igitur
rationem meam cum tua ratione contendere.*

Cic. Nat. Deor. l. 3.

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THE

BRITISH MUSEUM

OF NATURAL HISTORY

AND

OF MAN

AND

OF ANTHROPOLOGY

AND

OF ETHNOLOGY

AND

OF LINGUISTICS

AND

OF PHILOLOGY

AND

OF HISTORY

AND

OF GEOGRAPHY

AND

OF ASTRONOMY

AND

OF PHYSICS

AND

OF CHEMISTRY

AND

OF MEDICINE

AND

OF THE ARTS





TO
HENRY BROMLEY *Esq*;
OF
HORSHEATH
IN
CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

THE Author of this general Address takes the Liberty of inscribing it particularly to your Self; that he may give a Public Testimony of that Respect which in
* private

The Dedication.

private Life he always had, and must have for You. As he has known You from your first Years, he Esteems it one great Part of his Happiness, that he Lives to see You *now* so agreeably making Good all those Expectations which from a manly Judgment, a vast Memory, and most ready Apprehension You *then* gave, and which You could have answer'd *since* no other way than by appearing and being what You are. But his Design is, not to enter upon a Topic here, which may displease You, and not satisfy the World; when they
who

The Dedication.

and who do not yet know You, he would Charge him with Flattery, and they that do, with much more Reason might Tax him with Injustice. He only therefore desires Your favourable Acceptance of this, and the Sincerity of his Wishes. May You soon Shine in our Senate as a true Patriot, and Friend to British Liberty; may all the Virtues which fill up the Circle of Liberal Humanity, and are so much the Pleasure and Profit of all Converse and Society, and which are so much Your own already, Increase to the Perfection of Your Character,

®

The Dedication.

Character, and the Benefit of
others by Imitation; and may
You in the Possession and En-
joyment of a noble Fortune,
be all that is lovely and of good
Report; may You be Good as
well as Great. From

SIR, *Your most*

Faithful and most

Obliged Humble Servant,

ED. BASSET.



A N

ARGUMENT

CONCERNING THE REASONABLENESS
AND NECESSITY

O F

Christian Revelation.

ALATE most excellent Person,
equally respected for his Piety
and Learning, and endowed with
all the Qualities which fill up
the Character of a good Christian and
fine Gentleman, in his last Public
A (a) Be-

(a) Bequest to the World, addresses himself to You, *whose Birth improved by a Polite Education inclines You to receive all Strangers with Courtesy and Affability* : And as You chiefly have it in your Power to enlarge and beautify all the different Methods of doing Good ; as He Invites You to your true Greatness by those very Methods He recommends ; and insinuates the whole with almost an inimitable Simplicity, and perswasive Sweetness ; He promises to Himself *a very favourable Reception, and that a patient Hearing, accompanied with attentive Consideration, is the least Respect You will Pay to what He proposes to You.*

IT is upon this Ground also that I now venture to make this Address ; and although I cannot in the least pretend to come nigh the Weight and Merit of that great Example, I would yet Flatter my Self, that the Importance of *this* Subject also, so nearly allied to *that*, will find

(a) Mr. Nelson's Address to Persons of Quality, concerning the Methods of doing Good.

its

its Way to your Acceptance, and make some Amends for any Defects which may be found in the Manner of proposing it.

I.

THE Benefits of a liberal Education; joined to those Capacities and Opportunities of Improvement You enjoy, give You a Superiority over the rest of human Nature in its most valuable Perfections; nor are You more distinguished by the Wisdom of Providence in an Affluence of all worldly Abundance, (by which You are enabled to be Mercifull to the Wants of Others) than You are in the Extent of your Mind, (by which You can enlarge also your Reason for their Instruction :) And the same Wise and Good Providence has so ordered and diversify'd the Objects of both, that as your Charity can never fail of its Exercise for want of Object, neither can your Reason be ever at a Stand in its Enquiries,

ries, for want of new Scenes and Subjects of Contemplation.

II.

IT is from these two Heights that You appear so much to an Advantage; that You are able to do so much Good or so much Harm: to Contrive and set on Work, to stop and alter the great Machines of Action and Polity; to level in a manner the unequal Distributions of Providence, to determine the Fate and Happiness of Nations, to derive Blessings to public Communities, and open Comfort to afflicted and wretched Families; that You can view the Wonders and consider the harmony of visible Nature, and launch into the Depth of Physical Enquiries. In a Word, it is from hence, that You may become, as it were, Gods upon Earth, by your Beneficence and Authority, by your Example, and your Wisdom.

III. MAN

III.

MANKIND in General are Fond and Jealous of Liberty, and hence become so over-indulgent to themselves in the Privilege of their Nature, as Free-Agents, as to account Lawfull, and even Necessary Restraints a sort of Imposition and Slavery. Whatever appears forc'd and constrain'd, loses much of its Beauty and Influence; it reaches to the very Workings and Productions of the Mind, as well as outward Action; to be Natural, is to be Easy and Free, and that is to have all things Agreeable to our selves. But the Yoke is then most Unnatural, we imagin, when it lies Heavy upon us in our Civil Rights, and binds us down in a Community to Laws of Obedience and Subjection: Hence it is, that some great Friends to human Nature, have gone very far in resolving all Rights of civil Subordination into Power; and have contriv'd Man to be, in his State

of Nature, a Creature so very Unruly, so Positive and Impotent, each Individual so much *Sui juris*, as to be no ways Sociable, till compell'd to it by Rods and Axes; others, not so much delighted in Confusion, and more Agreeable to Man's natural Interest and Capacities, have Recourse to mutual Stipulations in a Contract of Protection and Obedience, with a direct View to those Ends, which all Government should, or is supposed to aim at. Whilst these again trace it up close to its divine Original, fixing the Reins of it so fast to the Throne and Majesty of God, that to him alone Kings and Potentates are accountable for Public Violence and Extravagances. To *You* therefore it is, that an injur'd People are beholden, when, perceiving that close Ruin and Destruction which arise equally from two of these such different Originals, you become the Mediators between the Sceptre, and the Multitude, and stand as middle Rocks to break the unruly Shocks of either against the other; 'Tis thus

thus that *You* are distinguish'd as the great Patrons and Assertors of true civil Freedom, while with so much Reason and Generosity *You* oppose those fantastic Schemes, which are purposely contrived to flatter the Will and Lusts of a Weak impotent Ruler, or Inflame the Passions of a Blind giddy Populace.

IV.

IT is almost the same with Man in his Religious Capacity; (*almost*, because though many are so Desperate as to live *without God in the World*, yet few or none, Lawless and ^{un}Accountable as they would be thought, can possibly choose to live without any Government at all) each Man finds within himself a Power of judging and determining, and is therefore unwilling any Thing called Religion should prescribe to his Thoughts, that *Good and Evil, Truth and Falsehood* should be Immutably fixt and settled to his Hands. Hence it is, that he will insist

A 4

upon

upon moral Schemes, and natural Principles, and cannot allow any Thing to be a part of Duty in *Religion*, which goes beyond the Depth of his own Search. He will have it (if there must be any) Dependent upon the Reasonings of Mankind, alterable with the Polity of a Nation, neither curb'd nor enlarged in any of its Branches by Incomprehensible, and therefore unreasonable Revelation. He will have it purely Human, adjusted to his own Relish, such as shall neither shock the Powers of his Understanding to believe, nor the Inclinations of his Will to practice. While the best and most Judicious part of Mankind, as becomes the Station of dependent accountable Creatures, esteem it their Happiness as well as Duty to submit their own Reason to Eternal Truth, and their Wills to unchangeable Goodness : who can find an amazing Subject for their Contemplation and Love, and Gratitude, but no Cause for haughty Complaints, and inquisitive Murmurings, when it shall please the
great

great Creator and Law-giver of the World
 to rectify the Mistakes, and clear up the
 Darkness of Stubborn and weak Reason;
 and even Superadd to our natural Obligations;
 to give us a clearer View of our Duty,
 to open the Intricacies and Malignity of Sin
 through all its Dangerous and deadly Consequences;
 and to Reveal even Himself in his adorable Attribute
 of Mercy for our Salvation: and if in the midst
 of all this Goodness and Condescension, He is
 pleased to check the Presumptions of the Wise
 and Prudent, by involving the Scenes of our
 Redemption in mysterious Depths, we submit
 with Humility to that Eternal Truth and
Word, which are a Pledge for the certainty
 of that which in this mixt and material State
 can never be comprehended by us.

V.

IN the midst of this Ferment, which
 the busy and inquisitive Minds raise among
 us,

us, by a Variety of new Theories, and strain'd Inventions, *You*, who are so well able and inclined to be the Protectors of rational Liberty, are justly upon the Guard, to watch all Attempts which may be made to impose a Religious Tyranny over the Reason and Conscience of Mankind. Such Advances, when carried on by the joint Arts of Avarice and Ambition, when those Arts are inflam'd by a false Fire from the Altar, make an immediate and inhuman Ravage, turn Sense into Instinct, and Reason into Mechanism. Whether the Pretence be of absolute Power and Authority, or of infallible Judgment, if it forbids all Examination and Reasonings in things of the greatest Importance; if it peremptorily resolves all into a blind implicit Obedience, forbids all Negatives, and even but to question is to rebel; it passes a sort of Nullity upon the very Creation of a human Soul, which by being made capable by God of judging for it self and from thence having a Right so to judge

and judge, is from thence also made sub-
 well-ject to his Rewards or Punishment. In
 rs of these Instances to shew a commendable
 the Zeal, is to vindicate both the Man and
 may the Christian, to be a Patriot, a Protest-
 anny ant, and a general Friend to Mankind
 Man altogether.

VI.

BUT however designing Men may
 turn on the one hand assume an unwarrant-
 Me-able Empire over the Minds of their
 be of People, by taking from them the very
 of in-Liberty of Thought and Reasoning, and
 Exa-determining their Consciences by their
 gs of own Rules and Dictates; as on the other
 ptori Hand, a Spirit of Contradiction and Sin-
 Obe-gularity may engage many a warm Head
 ever to argue against those Principles of hu-
 passe-man Nature, which he would be Thought
 eation at the same Time so much a Friend to;
 made yet it is Impossible for Thought it self to
 t self consider that Law of Nature under any
 so to other View, than even a Necessity of
 judge being

being under some Restraint: Man is a Free-Agent, and therefore capable at least of a proper Submission; he derives his Being from the great Creator, and therefore, since he is able, ought surely to acknowledge it: he is made an Accountable, a Sociable, a Religious, as well as a reasonable Creature, and it is possibly as Difficult to form a compleat Idea of Man without all the rest, as only without the last; Custom and a Degenerate way of many Individuals living in a mere Absurdity and Contradiction to all these, can never be an Argument against these general Marks and Distinctions, which separate him from other Ranks of Beings, and set him so much above them. All Laws, of whatever Sort, Civil or Religious, Divine or Human, Positive or Natural, whether for Direction of Practice or Thought, (and Laws surely there be which set Bounds even to Thought) whatever they be, they prescribe to Man, subject him by their Injunctions, and make him liable

liable to their Sanctions. They require an Imposition of some Necessary external Rites, which in their Sound and natural Intention are really coercive. As therefore the Christian Religion is a Body of Laws and Declarations made by infinite Wisdom and Goodness for Man's Direction, it cannot in this sole Respect be accounted as breaking in upon his Freedom, and Privilege, since it does no more, than what all Institutions are necessarily supposed to do.

VII.

HENCE it may be, that our Blessed Saviour calls his Religion *a Yoke* (*Matt. XI. 30.*) in Compliance to a receiv'd Mode of Speech, or the avowed Uneasiness of Mankind: the general Behaviour of the *Jews*, though so long under a sort of *Theocracy* in both States, was a Sad, but Faithfull, Representation of the rest of the World. That Law of *Moses*, which *Christ* in one Sense came to abolish,

lish, was in the Opinion of that Nation, a Yoke, which neither they, nor their (a) *Fathers were able to Bear*. To impose the *Mosaic Rites* upon the *Disciples to Christ*, is, (b) *the putting a Yoke upon their Necks*, a being entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage; It is represented as (c) *the Spirit of Bondage*. The rest of the World is (d) *a Creature under the Bondage of Corruption*; (e) *the whole Creation groaneth and travelleth in Pain*; which with many more Expressions of the like Nature sufficiently declare not only the Danger and Imperfections, but the Uneasiness of both the *Mosaic* and *Natural State*. So that our *Blessed Saviour* having (*Matt. xi. 27.*) declared the Authority of his Commission from God the Father, invites his Hearers to become his Disciples, by giving them a short and clear Account of those Advantages which his *Institutions* would have above any other yet published or experienced

(a) *Acts* xv. 10.
(d) *Ibid.* v. 21.

(b) *Ibid.* *Gal.* v. 1.
(e) v. 22.

(c) *Rom.* viii. 15.

on, in the World. Not that this Design
 their was to let them loose from all Obliga-
 im- tions, but to give a beneficial Exchange
 ples with Respect to the Yoke they bore, and
 upon the Master they served. *All things are*
 with *delivered up to me of my Father: and no*
 sen- *Man knoweth the Son, but the Father:*
 The *neither knoweth any Man the Father, save*
 under *the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son*
 whole *will reveal him. Come unto me all ye*
 ain; *that labour, and are heavy laden, and*
 s of *I will give you Rest. Take my Yoke upon*
 not *you, and learn of me, for I am Meek and*
 but *Lowly in Heart: and ye shall find Rest un*
 and *to your Souls: For my Yoke is Easy, and*
 your *my burden is Light. Verses, 27, 28,*
 Au- *29, 30.*

VIII.

It can never be expected, that all
 who live under the Helps and Encourage-
 ments, tho' of the best Profession in the
 World, should be Easy and Content:
 Passion and Design soon turn a Calm
 Mind

Mind into a Tempest, which meeting with Ignorance and Credulity abroad, raises a Clamour and Contradietion against all without Distinction. Not the most valuable Securities, an Indulgent and favourable Administration, under the very Labours and Watchings of Peace, can have Power sufficient to charm down the Swellings of a Bigotted Rebellious Spirit: 'tis well if their very Goodness is not made an Argument against them. This, we know, is the hard Fate of *Christ's* Religion: all the Cavils and Exceptions raised against it are generally founded upon no better a Bottom, than its laying a stricter Obligation upon those who profess it, than in the Reason of their usual Practice can be well accounted for: but because so much Ingenuity would appear too Direct and Extravagant, (as bearing Hard upon the Common and usefull Principles of Morality which few are willing, the World should be absolutely without) the usual Attacks are made with an awkward Pretence to Reason

son and natural Argument against those parts of it, especially which concern the *Theory* and pure Faith, leaving the Practice to shift for its self; well knowing how loose and Precarious that Obligation would be, could they but once shake off, and disengage that Principle and Evidence of Faith, which keeps the Christian Fabric together, and gives it all its Strength and Beauty. And thus a set of Men, Enemies to all Revelation, stand up for the Patrons of human Liberty; and under a close becoming Veil of opening the Frauds and Superstitions of Religious Bigottry, join with the misguided hasty Zeal and Metaphysical Abstractions of others, much better and Wiser than themselves, to ridicule the whole Bulk of Christian Mysteries; and screen their Weak and wicked Scandal under the Colours of *Free-Thought*, and their Contempt of God and his *Christ*, with their Respect to Nature and Morality.

IX.

It would be no Difficult undertaking to explain the Benefits and Excellency of the Christian Religion above all other Institutions, by a comparative *Delineation* of Particulars. But that is not the Design of this *Address*. He that complains of the Terms of his Profession, and the Conditions of his Obligation as a Christian would, I believe, be loth to exchange his Law-giver even for *Moses*; nay I should hope also that he might find so great Difference between the fantastic Glosses and hypocritical Evasions of the *Scribes* and *Pharisee*, compared with whatever He may be pleased to call Priest-craft and Religious Tyranny now, as would soon determin him to acknowledge his Christian Liberty against so severe a Bondage; and it would be an unpardonable Reflection upon that Religion we commonly profess, as well as upon the Sense and Understanding of those who

are chiefly concern'd in this *Address*, even to imagin that a Comparison can be offer'd at with any other fixt Scheme, whether *Mahometan*, or Old, or Modern *Pagan*: there remains then only *Natural Religion*, which is (a) *what Men might know, and should be obliged unto, by the mere Principles of Reason, improved by Consideration and Experience, without the help of Revelation*. And as this is usually allowed to comprehend under it a Belief and Acknowledgement of the Divine Nature and Existence, together with due Apprehensions of his Excellency and Perfections, joined to suitable Affections and Demeanour towards Him, here it is that they fix their Foot, and make a resolute Stand against all further Advances from the Pretence of Revelation, with Respect either to clearer Discoveries, or greater Obligations, laying the Strength of their Opposition against the Speculative and Mysterious Points of Christ's Religion, as being a Hardship upon, and

(a) *Bishop Wilkins's Principles of Natural Religion.*

Contradiction to the very Powers and
Privilege of human Reason.

X.

HERE therefore I appeal to *You* the great Masters and Judges of Reason; and desire only, that with those dispassionate Views, that honourable Zeal You have often shown for the *Civil* Liberties of Free People, with the same, You would here sit as Arbiters of their *Natural* and *Religious* Rights; and thus vindicate the Honour of God, the Truth of Revelation, the Purity and Justice of Reason and Your own Choice from that wild Extravagance which endeavours to distract them all. And I am the more assured in this *Address* to You, as being not only Noble in Birth and Station but (like those (a) *more Noble Bereans* whose Character stands so Fair upon the Account) capable of searching whether

(a) *Ευερίστες, Acts XVII. 11.*

and these Things be so, and (b) (which is true Nobility) well knowing from whence you derive your Being and Advantages, and whither all must finally tend,

XI.

THE Popular Objection is this. That it cannot be agreeable to Justice or Mercy in an infinite Almighty Being to declare *Faith* or *Belief* to be one indispensable Condition of future Happiness, and yet that this *Faith* shall be required to some call'd necessary Points far from being Obvious to human Reason, if not plainly against it. *Not to Justice*; Because every Operation of the Mind which is made Punishable or Rewardable, ought to be Human, and to be Human is to be Free, unforc'd and Voluntary; and in this Case a Man may be Punished for what he cannot Help, for following the Directions of those Powers God has fur-

(b) Μίαν ἀληθινὴν εὐγένειαν — τὸ εἰδέναι πῶς τε γιγνώσκωμεν. καὶ ποῦ ἐκτενέσσομεν. Greg. Naz. Orat. XIX. citante Suicero in voce εὐγένειας.

nished him with, and not being able to go beyond or, which is the same, against them. *Not to Mercy or Goodness*, which will thus be found Preposterous in rewarding a Faith which is either absolutely Implicit without Evidence or Reason, or is else forc'd upon the Mind by a superior Power, without consent of Will. That the *Grace of God which hath appeared unto all Men* is by no means established upon the Ruins of our Nature which still subsists Subject indeed to infinite Illusions, and the sport of Prejudice and Passion. As therefore the Powers of Action are not violently overruled by that *Grace* which gently guides and directs them to their proper Objects and in due Measures; neither should the same *Grace* put a Force upon the Powers of Reason by overstraining it against the Weight of its own Evidence and Comprehension.

XII.

THIS Objection is so far Plausible, as it appears to be built upon a tenderness for the Honour of God, and Man's Happiness; but at the bottom strikes hard at both: for surely it would be much more Disagreeable to the received Notions of Justice and Mercy, for any Man to pretend to the favour and Salvation of God, who shall deny or but doubt of his Existence, despise the common Tenders of his Providence, or give no Credit to his Revelations. It is the avowed Privilege of Law-givers and Public Benefactors to prescribe the Conditions of their Favour and Protection: a Wise and peaceable Man will pay so much Deference to the Prudence of his Rulers, as to sit down Quiet and Content, though possibly his private Views may not reach the depth of those Grounds upon which their Laws are founded. It is the least we owe, the very lowest Re-

turns we can make for that Protection and Liberty, which their Care and Abilities give us. To deny *that* to God, the great Law-giver of the World, who Measures to each Man his Time, and his Eternity, which is allowed in the necessary Relations of Prince and Subject, Patron and Client, is to set up for Sons of *Belial*, and to say, that we will neither be Happy our own way or not at all. It is to argue with the Almighty Creator, because he has not made us Wise as himself, which is Impossible, or will not, cannot be directed by our Folly, which is the utmost Blasphemy. They therefore who thus discharge the Freedom of their Thoughts against the Attributes of God, and from thence take occasions of Insult, and Cavil against the Rules of his Government, may upon the same Principle advance one bold Step further, and say (with *the Foolish Man*) *there is no God*. And then indeed they would speak so Plain, so much, I am afraid, from the Heart, and Consistent with

and with their other Instances of Free-think-
 Abi- ing, that there would be little occasion
 God, for artificial Names and Disguise; they
 world, would appear in plain Distinction, and
 me, under their proper Tribe — who have
 in, so little to do with Reason themselves,
 and, that nothing but mere Compassion and
 e up Humanity could perswade any one to
 we make Use of it for their Conviction,

XIII.

BUT because these are hard Reflections
 upon Conscience and Honour, such as
 my few will own they deserve; or Acknow-
 the ledge all the Consequences of so much
 the Absurdity; I shall ask Leave also to take
 take *first Principles* for granted, and suppose
 the these Gentlemen (who are, they say, E-
 the nemies to only the mysterious parts of
 Step Christianity) well agreed in the general
 Ian Fundamentals of Religion; this, I should
 they hope, to be no unreasonable Demand,
 n a because I imagin it to be a much easier
 tent Task even for me to prove the Certain-
 with ty

ry not of Natural only, but revealed Religion too, than it can be for them to get rid of those unhandſom Conſequences. We ſuppoſe then all to be ſound and fair thus far, and that with Reſpect to *Chriſt's* Religion they have only entertained ſome well-grounded Scruples concerning that part of its Revelation, which they cannot comprehend; and therefore think to be ſo far from being an Article of Faith, that it cannot in any Senſe poſſibly be true. They ſay further that the *Chriſtian* is the moſt reaſonable Religion in the World, as having the true God, the ſupreme Reaſon for its Author and Object, that it is certainly deſigned for the Benefit, the Speculation and the Practice of a reaſonable Creature, and therefore that Speculation as well as Practice ſhould be made Agreeable to rational Capacities. They are both together calculated to perfect the Mind of Man in its two great Faculties of Underſtanding and Will; and as the latter is then moſt Regular when it beſt agrees with

with and conforms to its Rules of Action, neither can the first be any ways Compleat and Impartial, but by having the whole Scene laid open to its Capacity; and therefore, in short, there cannot, must not be any Mystery in it. This is the formidable Objection in its full Strength; how far it answers the Noise and Figure it makes in our World of Controversy, we will now more particularly see.

XIV.

IT is some Disparagement to an Argument when it appears very Singular, but a greater when it is very Conceited, and built upon strange Presumptions. This is the Case here. For the whole is grounded upon this fine Maxim, that to be *above Reason*, and to be *contrary to Reason* are the same Thing; that what human Reason cannot comprehend, cannot in any Reason be True, or, in plainer Terms, that human Reason is the Measure

sure of all Truth; from whence it follows, that Faith as well as Reason having Truth for its Object, they must all go on and stop friendly together, not so much for want of Capacity in the Understanding, as really because there can be nothing further Reasonable in the Object it self. Thus while they labour to show the extent of their Wit, they lose their Senses; and, rather than acknowledge their Ignorance and Insufficiency in common with human Nature, choose to swallow Contradictions. For however the Argument may proceed well sometimes from *non Apparet* to *non Existit*, and is undoubtedly of great Authority in many cases of civil Life, and sometimes perhaps in Philosophy, yet here it is Ridiculous even to Absurdity; for I would only ask whether there is no Difference between not being able to perceive how a Thing can be, and plainly perceiving that it cannot be? Whether it is the same, to be assured from a plain positive Evidence and Determination,

termination, that this Axiom is True,
 that Position false, as to acknowledge with
 great Ingenuity, that after all our Re-
 searches, by our own natural Abilities we
 cannot determine at all concerning it?
 Must Finite and Infinite become Parallels,
 and all order and Distinction of Beings
 with their several Powers be utterly con-
 founded? Must original independent Mind
 as well as all created Spiritual Intelligen-
 cies be brought down to Man's poor Le-
 vel, and eternal Truth be represented by
 its faint and mangled Image? Vain Crea-
 ture! Go on; and let the most imperfect
 Glimmerings and Shadows of Reason even
 in Brute Beasts have some favourable In-
 dulgence, and be allowed a Privilege of
 Capacity at least Human, since Human
 cannot be contented with its own. But
 Alas! Such Presumptions are so far from
 being the Standard of human Perfection,
 or doing either Honour or Service to that
Species, that any sober Inquirer would,
 from this single Essay only, be violent-
 ly tempted to imagine but very little
 Difference in the whole *Kind*. XV.

XV.

I know these are Consequences which the boldest Caviller dares not own: here even his Free-Thinking (that Plausible and abused Distinction) forsakes him out of mere Shame, and it is high Time it should. But as the Argument is not mine, neither am I answerable for the Consequences that flow from it: whoever form'd that, must bear the Weight of these. The Argument is their own, and appears not only in the Style of low Pensionary Scriblers, but in those of a higher Class, who in the midst of their Fire and critical Heats are pleased sometimes, in great Humility, to submit to this popular Plainness, and relax their own and their Reader's Attention from that nice heavy part of Learning: the Consequences too are so far their own, as they unavoidably follow their own Argument. If they shall esteem it a sufficient Answer to say that they neither own
 nor

nor see these Consequences, (and which are therefore not to be charged upon them) they must give me leave also to say, that then they would do much better, either utterly to disclaim the Argument, or else try how they can maintain both: and then indeed the World would not long be troubled with either. For (a) as a most Judicious and learned Gentleman has observed in a Case, I think, not very Foreign to this, *if there be not Reasons of Conscience obliging a good Man to speak out, there are always Reasons of Prudence which should make a wise Man hold his Tongue.*

XVI.

THE many Volumes which have directly treated, or *in Transitu* only, of this important Question, and with so much good Sense and Learning among us, have undoubtedly exhausted the Subject, and left little or nothing to be added; con-

(a) Dr. Waterland, *Defense of Queries* pag. 420. Ed. 3.

sidering

considering especially those masterly Hands it has but lately passed through on both sides : the Controversy seems to be brought to a Point, and Truth become Triumphant ; when the Cause is pleaded not by those only whom their Office and course of Study has made well acquainted with it, and who, in the unkind Censure of too many, are engaged by Interest to be upon their Guard, but by others whose high Station and civil Avocations might have been a just Apology for their Silence, did not the force of Truth, their own Convictions, and a sort of indignation urge them to be public Advocates. By this they have shown that good Sense and Reason never appear so much to an Advantage, as when joined by Birth and Titles to vindicate the Honour of Revelation by and in *Christ* its Divine Author.

BUT my Design is not to enter upon that field of Particulars ; but to offer one reasonable Proof in behalf of *Christian* Revelation, and which I the more readily

by choose, as being of a Complexion
 suitable to those who are not to be born
 down by the Powers of any mere Autho-
 rity whatsoever. And if the Argument
 should not in its self appear absolutely
 New, I would yet humbly hope the man-
 ner of directing it, and the carrying it on
 further than is usually observed, will
 have its Excuses at least, if not make
 way for its favourable Reception.

XVII.

WE say then that there are Mysteries
 in *Christ's* Religion, such as are above our
 possible Comprehension, and which are
 therefore reveal'd to us by the Holy
 Spirit of God in the New Testament, and
 are moreover declared to be such reveal'd
 Truths as are necessary to be believed in
 order to Eternal Salvation: We say further
 that in this very Respect the Religion of
 the Gospel is Easy, Free and Reasonable,
 beyond any other Scheme which this
 seeming Concern for the Rights and Pri-
 vilege

vilege of Reason can propose; whatever they mean by Reason or the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, we maintain, that there is more Dissatisfaction, more room for Scruple and Caviel, and in General more of Absurdity and Injustice in whatever they recommend, than in what we firmly believe, and they so much misrepresent. This shall be consider'd now Distinct from that Truth and Sufficiency of Revelation upon which Christian Faith is merely founded, because that is flying to Authority, which however Divine, and Incontestable, is that unreasonable Body of Reserve which our Bigottry flies to, when we are beat out of every Thing else, and therefore they will manage their own way, or else have nothing to do with.

XVIII.

REASON has a fourfold Acceptation.
 1. in General, as it is the natural Rule of human Duty. Or 2. Particular; the Reason

Reason of this or that Man. Or. 3. the Understanding by which all Determinations are made. Or 4. the Motive which induces the Mind to make the Determination. The first is the Determination every one should make in Things both of Belief or Speculation, and Practice; the second is what he does make; the third is the Faculty that determines, or rather the Sentence upon the Debate which renders the Thought Compleat. All this may be clearly seen by the following Instance, *viz.* Reason forbids Men to do Wrong, but the Reason of a Miser prompts him to do any Wrong which he may get by, for his Reason is Corrupted, and the Reason of it is, his Covetousness (*a*). In this Debate the two first Acceptations only, need to be observed, and then by Reason will be understood that Faculty in human Nature, (*b*) whereby Man is supposed to be

(*a*) Vid. an Enquiry into Religion, and the Use of Reason concerning it, 8vo. 1711. By a Lay-hand, from whence this is taken, Chap. vi.

(*b*) Mr. Locke.

distinguished from Beasts, and wherein it is Evident he very much surpasses them by which all his other intellectual Faculties are of Necessity assisted for the Enlargement of his Knowledge, and regulating his Assent and Determination. The Powers and extent of this Faculty must therefore be considered either in the Collective body of Mankind in its greatest Perfection, or as the particular rational Faculty of this or that Man; or if you will, more particularly, the Reason of those only who appear in Defence of this Argument. In every of the Cases the Objection will be found to be very Partial and Inconsiderate. For,

XIX.

It is an allowed Maxim, that an Objection, to which every Thing is almost equally Obnoxious, cannot fairly be made against any Thing: and I say that what is objected against *Christ's Religion* being Mysterious and above rational Comprehension

erehensions, will hold the same in ab-
 tracted Speculations, in the search of
 material Truths, and plain natural En-
 quiries. Examine the most compleat Heads
 of Antient *Greece* and *Italy*, add to their
 early Discoveries, the Labour and Inven-
 tion of succeeding Ages, join to these
 the Improvements which this and the last
 inquisitive Age have made, raise this ge-
 neral Character into one large View as it
 now stands among us after half a Centu-
 ry of Ages ; and then tell me, after so
 many Discoveries, in such a train of
 Time, concerning the Heights or Depths
 of Nature in the Heavens, the Earth, its
 several Tribes of Inhabitants, and in our
 selves, what Advances Reason has made
 in so vast a Theory ? What a mean and
 short Appearance the most finisht System
 makes, when stript of what is perhaps
 grounded upon Mistake, or at best up-
 on Conjecture ? How little when oppo-
 sed to that Abyfs of Truth we are un-
 able to look into ? I would not in the
 least detract from the great Names of

Venerable Antiquity, or ungratefully deny a *Huygens*, a *Boyle*, or a *Newton* their due Praises, who have been so Wonderful in this part of Learning, and raised it to a pitch, Mankind was unacquainted with before, and now seems unable to go beyond: the Complaint of the best and wisest Genius's down from *Socrates* to the Moderns has been, and is the same. They found their Mind after all their Study and Pains dark and Doubtfull, desirous of more Light, but ill assured of what they had, and Incapable of finding more. What they cannot comprehend is surely as much a Mystery in Nature, as any part of Reveal'd Religion, for Reason is at a full stop in both: the most illiterate Peasant knows that there are such Appearances, different Powers and a variety of Effects in the several parts of visible Nature; but from what Conjunctions, by what immediate Causes they thus move, and have their Influence, he is utterly Ignorant, and the Wisest touch but Superficially. It would

be Infidelity in Philosophy and against common Sense to dispute the Heat of the Sun, the Powers of the Load-Stone, the Force and Progress of Winds, and the Tides of the Seas, nay and the very Existence of Substance, because we cannot to satisfaction solve these different *Phænomena*, and know nothing what the last is. We are Sensible of the Sun's Fire, the Stone has its wonderfull Attraction, the Waters their unnatural Ascents, the Winds and Meteors there different Rage and Tumults; these are the Experience, the Dread or the Comfort of every Mariner; we submit with Silence and Admiration, to the Impressions of a passive Sense so notoriously convincing, when further the most Subtle and happy Naturalist is at a loss for a Solution. Be Patient, and apply this to Religion and its Mysteries: Reason, you will say, and natural Reflections may go very great Lengths here; it may inform you that this World of Beings and Succession must have a Beginning; that there is an Infi-

nite Eternal Being, a necessary Existence which created this World in time, and preserves and governs it. Follow, you say, this Clue of Reason a little closer through the Maze and Windings of Providence, and the Hints of your own conscious Life, and you will proceed to the Distinctions of Good and Evil, of Matter and Spirit, the Immortality of the latter, and by a further Consequence, to an after Retribution of Rewards and Punishments. Let it be allowed (for the Present) that a close and calm Reasoner may have very good Grounds for believing all these Particulars to be True; and yet, I fear, he would be strangely at a loss in forming his Idea's to Acquiescence and Satisfaction: at least I am strongly tempted to think so from what Heathen Antiquity has afforded us concerning these Truths before the Revelation of the Gospel; (and which I should imagin to be the best way to judge without being deceived.) We shall find there no great matter of Assurance, nothing Clear and Positive,
but

but rather a range of Doubts and Scruples, which ended sometimes in Wishes that what was in its self so Agreeable to the Interest and best Thoughts of their Mind might at last in some Sense, way or other, be True. If God therefore in Condescension to this Weakness of Mankind, shall be pleased to strengthen these imperfect Notices, and superadd fresh Discoveries both of himself, and the principal Points of Religion which depend so much upon these Discoveries; if he shall injoin us a steadfast Belief of these upon his Word revealing them, we can no more account this a Force upon Reason and Understanding than the other. For if these are general Truths in natural Reason, *there is a God, Man's Soul is Immortal and Incorporeal, and lives after Death in a State of Happiness or Misery, &c.* and yet these general Truths, as to the manner of their Existence are (some of them, if not all) Incomprehensible, why may not any particular Revelation concerning them be so too? Nay how indeed

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deed should it be otherwise, unless the Powers of the Mind are supernaturally assisted to comprehend them? Why should any Truth be treated *otherwise than as it is*, although Man should be obliged to believe it *implicitly* upon God's Declaration concerning it, and under severe Penalties if he will not? This is really Perverseness; for however we may be in many Instances so conscious of Life as to disapprove a Law, because of the Sanction, yet no one will say, that the Law loses its Obligation upon that Account; for we know all Laws, without proper Sanctions, would be Precarious, if not Insignificant.

So that if human Nature in its full Vigour and Capacity, in a Combination of all the best Reasonings and lucky Discoveries through Ages cannot comprehend the Mysteries of Nature (which at the very best are but the Machines of the great Creator's Power and Wisdom) and which we know nevertheless have a positive Existence; what unreasonableness is it,

it, that in Religion some Points concerning God and our selves too should be above our reach? Why should these be excepted against as mere Impositions upon our Understanding, rather than any Thing else, of which after all our Boastings, we are Equally and universally Ignorant.

XX.

NEVER let it be said that the two Cases are not alike; for that every Man may be safely Ignorant of the *Speculative* Truths of Nature, that he may deny or assert as he thinks fit, is at liberty to stop or prosecute his Enquiries, to strengthen them by repeated Observations, which after all go an equal Pace with his Reason, and stop regularly together. Whereas the Case is quite otherwise in the Mysteries of *Christ's* Religion; where as we cannot reason for want of Capacity, neither must we deny or disbelieve for fear of Punishment. This indeed is True, and makes some difference between them; but

but then it is such a difference, as alters the present State of the Comparison, which turns upon the real Incapacity of human Reason seen and confessed equally in both. The Question does not (at least as yet) concern the Privilege of the great Creator, and Law-giver to point his Sanctions how and where he pleases, in order to bring about the Purposes of his Will ; all which as they cannot but be Agreeable to his Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, so must they also be to the Good and Happiness of his Creatures. Of this therefore we shall have Occasion to say something more presently.

XXI.

SUPPOSE then it should have pleased God to have reveal'd by *Christ* and his Apostles, one of the most abstruse Points in all Natural Philosophy, and such as, when declared, contradicted all the common Notions of Mankind, and the very Evidence of Sense concerning it, and had
made

made this a necessary Article of Belief in order to Eternal Salvation. Let it be, for Instance, the *Motion of the Earth*, which however it be Orthodox Philosophy now among the Learned, would have appeared in that Age a ridiculous and most unreasonable Assertion. What sort of arguing could you make against it? Why this. We have taken a great deal of Pains to find this out, wiser Heads than ours have laboured hard to comprehend it; this by no Means suits the common Notions and Reasonings of Mankind, nay it is against them and our very Senses which tell us plainly the Contrary. We know not what to make of it, it is Incomprehensible, Unreasonable, it is Impossible, and no such Thing. And therefore to enjoin the Belief of it upon Pain of Damnation is great Injustice. There cannot be any occasion to enlarge upon this. The Supposal is not in the least Unreasonable. And if this sort of Arguing appears with but a bad Grace as Translated hither, I should hope the Gentle-

Gentlemen of Reason will not be so very fond of it in another Case where it certainly appears much Worse.

XXII.

FURTHER, if they will say that the Mysteries of *Christ's* Religion are contrary to Reason, and understand by that the *particular Faculty of Knowledge in this or that Man*, or more particularly, their own: I venture to say further, that, in this partial view of Reason, there must of necessity be Mysteries in *Christ's* Religion, above Comprehension, and that otherwise the great Ends of Revelation and the *Grace of God which hath appeared unto all Men*, could not be answered. Which in its Principles both of Faith and Practice is calculated by its Divine Author for the general Salvation of Mankind, so as to leave every one Self-condemned, and without Excuse. Reason, as it is now considered, differs very much in Individuals: all cannot Exert themselves

selves alike ; Inclination, Capacity, Disposition of Organs, Strength and Temper of Body, and Opportunities of Improvement occasion each of them a very great Variety, however the Soul may at first be formed. Talk to this Man of the Powers of *Algebra*, and the Depths of Demonstration, of the Heavenly Systems or any other Science which some fine Spirits are so Familiar with, and you are as much in the Clouds to him, as you would be to your self in advancing your Attempts to infinite Space, and the measuring of Eternity : unless God had at first created all human Souls equally Capable of Intellectual Truths ; (which no one I believe, ever thought he could prove) nay, unless all Possibilities of after Improvements or Degeneracy had been excluded from the Influences of material Sensations, much Carelessness or much Application ; (which no one, I believe, ever wish't for) these Varieties and Degrees must of Necessity be admitted, suitable to the different Scenes
 of

of Speculation and Practice which Nature so richly supplies, and the Business, Wants, and very Amusements of Society so much enlarge; and we know that the Soul of Man and the World about him would be but a very Dull and unactive Piece of Uniformity without them: so that if this is undeniably True in the Prosecution of those *Verities* which are neither Necessary to all, nor required of all, because to many they would be Useless, if they were known, and all are Uncapable of knowing them, and yet all these Things are in themselves very Reasonable, how could the same be avoided in the Religion of *Christ*, if it were so Reasonable as these Gentlemen would understand it to be? They would not, I hope, banish all Faith out of the World, and insist upon Knowledge, strict Science, and full Demonstration in Life; this is mere Humour, and a real Banter upon all Mankind, which no *Academic* or *Pyrrhonist* durst ever stick to but for a Week. They therefore are against

gainst those Articles only, which we say are necessary to be believed by all Christians in order to Salvation, for this plain Reason, because they are plainly revealed in Scripture, and though above our Comprehension, the Faith of them is in the very Terms of that Salvation which we expect. They would have the Faith reasonable, that is, such as their Reason can account for, and comprehend in all its Branches; but then they must be asked what sort of Scheme their own Fancy is able to form, which shall be suited to so many different Capacities as well as their own? How would they extend it to all Mankind, who must be all equally concerned in it? Can they answer for every Body as well as themselves? Or have any Assurance that no one will object against, and find many a Fault with their Models, when they have had the Assurance to find Fault with what God himself has ordained? If they can answer for their own Teaching, they can never do it for the Will or the Capacity

D

of

of a World of Disciples, who may be as Obstinate and Conceited as themselves, and insist upon the Liberty of departing from their Master's Principles, and setting up new Thoughts and Independency for themselves. This has been in Fact very much the way of the World from the beginnings of Wisdom and Philosophy; each Successor leaves his Master as he thinks fit, opens a Rival School, becomes the Head of another Sect, frames opposite Principles, and for a while maintains himself in the general Bustle, 'till his upstart Novelties are jostled out by others, and these again make way for a new Wit big with Error and its own Whimsies: Heathen Philosophy, or, if you please, Reason amused and giddied it self very much in running this fine Circle of Vanity, and in endeavouring to make new Truths, lost all that was Old and Valuable, and after all left the World not a jot Wiser or better than before. And if we imagin that it was otherwise when this *enticing Wisdom of Man*

was

was translated from the Schools and Portico's of *Athens* to the *Christian Synagogue*, we shall be very much mistaken: at least it is the Complaint of the primitive Writers, that (a) all the Spawn of Heresy which poison'd the Church of *Christ*, and infected it with so many Distempers, was hatcht there; and (b) the very best of their Philosophers, the Divine *Plato*, was their Grand Arsenal: in-
 somuch that some considering the Mischiefs and Follies it produced, maintained the Devil to be the Author of it. (c) This indeed may be carrying the Matter too farr, against that which *Clemens Alexandrinus*, and *J. Martyr* so much applaud as (d) a most valuable Possession, a

(a) De quorum ingeniis omnis hæresis animatur. *Tertull. adv. Marc. l. 1. Hæreticorum Patriarchæ Philosophi. Id. ad. Hermog. Ipsæ hæreses a Philosophiâ subornantur. Id. de Præscrip.*

(b) Doleo Platonem omnium Hæreticorum Condimentarium factum. *Id. de animâ.*

(c) Vid. *Clem. Alexand. Strom. 6. pag. 693. Edit. Sylb.* Where however he denies it, and says, that God gave Philosophy to the *Gentiles* for the same Purposes, as he gave the Law to the *Jews*. *Ἐικότως ἐν Ἰουδαίῳ μὲν Νόμῳ Ἑλλάδι δὲ φιλοσοφία, μέχρι τῆς παρυσίας.* By the Law meaning the Decalogue, and by Philosophy, Reason.

(d) Μέγιστον κτήμα καὶ τιμιώτατον Θεῶν, &c. *I. Mart. Tryph. Θέως ἔργον προνοίας, Θεῶν δωρεῶν Ἑλλήσιν. Cl. Alex. Strom. lib. 1. passim.*

Work of Divine Providence, which alone could recommend to God, &c. But then both of them tell you it would be to no Purpose to look for this among the different Sects of Philosophers: This was a (a) Philosophy supported by a Divine Tradition, the (b) Knowledge and Confession of the true God, (c) a Miscellany and pickt Collection of what any or all of them had taught well; and much more to the same Purpose; I say notwithstanding all these fine Elogies, Experience, and what has been said above, is more than Sufficient to show us the Door at which the Swarm of antient Heresies first entered, where the new ones still enter in, or the Old are revived, and that is, by leaning too much to our own Understanding, and departing

(a) Ἡ κατὰ τὴν Θεῖαν παράδοσιν φιλοσοφία Id. Ibid. φιλοσοφία δὲ ἐς Στωϊκὴν λέγω—&c. ἀλλ' ὅσα εἰρήται παρ' ἐκείτης τῇ αἰρέσει τὰς καλῶς &c. Ibid. Οὐ γὰρ ἀν Πλατωνικοὶ ἦσαν &c. μιᾶς ἕως ταύτης ἐπισήμης &c. *J. Mart. Tryph.* 218.

(b) Ἐπισήμη τῇ ὄντι καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἐπίγνωσις. Id. Ibid. 220. where is this Knowledge to be met with in the Gentile Philosophy?

(c) *Clem. Alexand.* ubi supra.

from the Authority of Revelation when it commands Assent to those Things which are above it. (a).

XXIII.

WHILE therefore these Reasoners pretend to ease the Christian World of an Imposition by removing this Stumbling-block of Mysteries out of the way, they would do well to consider whither this preposterous Zeal and Affectation carries them. Instead of perhaps two or three Mysteries in General they unavoidably raise particular Mysteries to particular Persons; they confound the Harmony of Divine Faith, and distract it with Contradiction and Partiality. Under the Pretence of *Christian Liberty*, of easing their Brethren, and reconciling every Thing (Things in Heaven, and Things on Earth) to natural Sense and Reason, they ex-

(a) Οὐ τί αἱ θεῖα λέγουσι γράφαί ζητῶντες, ἀλλ' ὅποιον χῆμα συλλογισμῶ εἰς τὴν ἀδεότητα ἐνρεθῇ σύστασιν φιλοπόνοῦς ἀσκῶντες—γινώσκοντες ἐπιτηδεύουσιν &c. *Euseb. Hist. Eccles. lib. 5. cap. ult.* Ex antiquo autore adv. Artemonis hæresin.

clude one half from all hopes of Salvation. These are left to the Direction of an *Ignis Fatuus*, a wild extravagant humourfome Guide, which after having dazzled them with a few Skips and Dancings, leads them on to Bogs and Precipices, and there leaves them in utter Darkness and Confusion. And it may be further observed in Confirmation of what has been thus far urged, that the Tryal of *Adam's* Obedience was fixt upon his abstaining from the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*; he was not satisfied with the boundaries God assigned him, but aspires to unlawfull Improvements, he desires *to be made Wise*, Wiser than God made or allowed him to be; and thus in a State of so much Innocence and Perfection is betrayed into Sin, and Death. Reason even in Paradise (I had almost said Intuition) leads the first Pair into Confusion and Shame, and therefore God, graciously mindfull of this rebellious Essay under the first Covenant, has been pleased to alter the
Terms

Terms of Obedience in the second, well knowing that we have the same Conceits and Vanity, less Understanding and more Sin; so that hence we have a just occasion of Praise and Thanksgiving, that in deference to the Weakness and Caprice of human Minds, a restraint is laid upon all alike by one uniform regular Basis of Faith, in a full and plain Revelation, which carries along with it such Demonstrations of its Divinity, as are sufficient, in an humble and a quiet Soul, to guard against all the Shocks of natural Reason, by resolving the whole of our *Christian* Faith into a ready Assent to that Testimony, which unquestionably proceeds from God. Such truly are those *Babes* to whom these Things are revealed, and such the *Wise and Prudent* from whom our Saviour saith, *God hath hid them.* (Matt. XI. 25.) *in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not.* 2 Cor. 4. 4.

XXIV.

THUS far Reason has been considered as it were in Abstract and Speculation only; we must now regard it in a closer Sense, as being, as already mentioned, *the natural Rule of human Duty*. And here also the Expedience and even Necessity of Revelation in the Christian Institutions will appear Plain and Evident. The Point, I believe, the least controverted of any among the different Sects in *Christ's* Religion is, that the Holy Scriptures are a most compleat Rule of Life, or System of Morality. Its most avowed Enemies, Old and New, pretended *Christian* or real *Pagan*, have thought it more for their Purpose to strain the *Gentile* Moralists to that true Standard by a very weak Comparison than to correct it. Thus (a) *Celsus* charges *Christ* himself as a Plagiary from *Plato*, and *Julian* prefer'd *Theognis*, *Phocylides*, and *Isocra-*

(a) Origenes contra *Cels.* lib. 6. pag. 283, &c.

tes, to *Solomon*, and endeavoured to ruin Christianity by setting up the Schools of Philosophy, and shutting up those of the Christians. And thus also *Apollonius* is compared to our Blessed Saviour. I have indeed heard of one in our own Nation, who has Blasphemously declared in Print, either for himself, or his Friend, (a) that he could write as good a Moral as our Saviour; but then, as if a little jealous of his own Abilities, he solicits the late Mr. *Locke* to give us something more easy, and Evident, a more perfect System of the Laws of natural Religion. This is indeed making sure Work at once, and striking down not the Mosaic and Christian Institutions only, but all Antiquity for the sake of an impious vile Compliment, to a Gentleman, who had more Understanding, Modesty and Christianity than to undertake it, or entertain so good an Opinion of himself, so mean

(a) See two Pamphlets Entit. *The Growth of Deism in England*, and a Letter to a Deist Anno. 1696. with the Answer to them.

a Thought

a Thought even of the Antient Moralists, or such Blasphemy against *Moses* and the Prophets, against *Christ* and his Apostles. But this is a rant of Extravagance proper only to show how Impossible it is for such dangerous Wits to satisfy either themselves or others, and find any sure Footing, when once they have laid aside Revelation. Let these therefore be left, as they deserve, in their own Shame, and to the World's Contempt. We say then that the Holy Scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, are a compleat Rule of Life and Manners, that they are *that Grace of God which hath appeared unto all Men, teaching us that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World*: in Comparison of this all the profitable Lessons of Instruction which either Poets first or Philosophers afterwards composed are in Reality mere Rudiments and but *beggarly Elements of the World*: Weak, Shallow and unmanly; fit only (as St. Cyril

Cyril of Alexandria answers *Julian* in Vindication of *Solomon's* Works, (and we surely may answer with more Reason in Vindication of the New Testament) (a) for the Prattle of Nurses to their Children, or at the most for Pedagogues to teach little Boys. And yet low and Imperfect as they were in their Writings, their Practice and Example (by an usual Inconsistency common with them to too many others) was beneath their Rules. The very best of them degenerated from first Principles, and as (b) there is not
 ' one such wise Instruction to be found
 ' in all their Books, as the very first of
 ' all in *Solomon's*, which he lays as the
 ' ground of all Wisdom (but they alas!
 ' did not think of) that *the fear of the*
 ' *Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*; so
 in Consequence we find that they were the Patrons and Encouragers of Idolatry, and Examples of the most fashionable and unnatural Vices, equal to the very

(a) Cited by Bishop *Patrick* in his Preface to Paraphrase on the Proverbs.

(b) Bishop *Patrick* Ibid.

Populace and most Ignorant among them; thus it proceeded through all Ranks of Men and the course of Ages, till the *fulness of Time* brought in *everlasting Righteousness*. Even then, when the Majesty of *Italy* stood in its full Glory, and triumph'd over *Greece* and *Asia* in Arts, as well as Arms; when human Nature seem'd to be at a Stand, as unable to go beyond those Improvements, the great Heads and Hearts of *Rome* then had advanced it to; when Eloquence, Poetry, and the whole Circle of liberal Science were such as to become the Standard of Perfection to all future Ages; did Religion and the moral Virtues of Life appear to any Advantage? Or was Philosophy more Regular and uniform, when taught to speak the Style of *Latium* than before in the Garb of *Athens*? Or rather does it not remain the same Jargon still, which all the Reason and Eloquence of *Cicero* himself cannot make Consistent or Satisfactory to himself, or any other? Infomuch that scarce any one Thing could tempt a
 Man

Man at this Time to read either his Theology or Philosophy, but that Majestick Purity with which he treats these and all other Subjects. What was the public Worship but the collected Polytheism and Idolatry of their own and every distant Nation? What was the general Practice but such as St. *Paul* a few Years after gives so sad an Account of? (*Romans* Chap. 1.) If we imagin the *Apostles* to have amplified that Relation, their own Historians will give you much the same or no better an Account. Not an *Emperor* but must be *Deified* either Alive or Dead, and the greater Monster he is on Earth, the fitter for the *Chorus* of his Brother *Demons*: insomuch that I can never wonder at the Design one of them had of making his Horse *Consul*, and actually making him a *Priest* to his own Divinity, when the Subjects of that *Emperor* were so Stupid as to make him a God. But thus it was: and they who triumphed over the Ruins of their antient Liberty by an absolute unlimited

limited Monarchy, are by an unaccountable Reverse of Flattery made Members of a common-wealth above. So Just is that Reflection which (a) a late famous Writer makes upon the blindness, the Fury and Contradiction of all *Pagan Theology*, viz. That if there could be found any spiritual Intelligences who had no Knowledge of Man but from the Definition of a reasonable Creature, without any History of Facts, it would be utterly Impossible to perswade them that the Books of *Arnobius*, *Clement of Alexandria*, *Tertullian*, *St. Augustin*, *Firminus Maternus*, and the like Apologies against *Paganism*, were ever wrote against a Religion actually established in the World; they would affirm that it can not possibly be. They would maintain these Impositions to be the Sport of idle Luxuriant Wits, mere Fiction and Romance. For what Appearance is there, that a reasonable Creature should establish its Theo-

(a) *Pensées sur la Comete, &c. §. cxxiv.* Tout y montre, l'aveuglement, la fureur, & la contradiction: & je soutiens, &c.

logy and Divine Worship upon such a heap of Absurdities and Contradictions which in the *Pagan* Systems so manifestly destroy one another? But to the shame of Man, these Books of the Antient Fathers confute real Errors, and those very Errors too have had their Apologists among the Learned.

XXV.

IT is an easy Matter to account for this general Corruption; whatever Preventions and Assistances they possibly might otherwise have had, were all swallowed up in one great Gulf of Sin, *viz.* Polytheism and gross Idolatry. This was the first capital Crime, and brought on all the rest. (a) *They who changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four footed Beasts, and creeping Things; who changed the Truth of God*

(a) *Rom. Cap. I. 23, 25.*

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into a Lye, and worshipped and served the Creature (a) more than the Creator, are for this (b) Cause, given up to Uncleanness, unto vile Affections, &c. (d) the devising of Idols was the beginning of spiritual Fornication, and the Invention of them the corruption of Life; this, like an Error in the first Concoction, diffused its taint through the whole Mass and poison'd the intellectual Oeconomy; and surely Reason, which in the first Instance of Morality (for such I call it) wilfully made so false a Step, was like to prove but an unhappy Guide in all subsequent Directions. And thus it was in Effect; it needs not the least Proof. Their Polytheism, the Notions they had of the Dispositions, Qualities and Tempers of their *Pantheon*, their Religion it self dressed up in the Rites and Ceremonies of Worship, their public Games and secret Initiations,

(a) Παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα, contrary, in Opposition to, in Neglect of the Creator, which should seem to be the fuller Sense with Respect to Pagans, who did not as the Inhabitants of *Samaria*, fear the Lord and serve their own Gods. Kings II. Cap. 17. v. 33.

(b) διὰ τὴν αἵρεσιν. 24. διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀπειθήναι αὐτοὺς ὁ Θεός, &c. v. 26.

(c) Wisdom cap. XIV. 12.

as such, could not possibly furnish any one Man of common Sense and Observation with one Lesson profitable to good Manners, or become a restraint to a corrupted evil Heart.

XXVI.

THE few great Examples, which are transmitted to us through the length of Heathenism, are no just Exception to this general Remark; Education, a particular Temperament, a resentment of Honour, a love of Glory joined to that darling Passion, the Love of their Country, had their Influences no doubt; and above all, that Philosophy which taught them to improve the common Notions and Idea's of Reason might often engage particular Minds to the Practice of some reputed social and political Virtues, for which they became Remarkable; and perhaps we may be allowed to say that the Creator of the World, (*who in these times past suffered all Nations to*
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walk

walk in their own Ways, and nevertheless left not himself without Witness, in that he did Good, and gave Rain from Heaven and fruitfull Seasons, filling their Hearts with Food and Gladness. (Acts XIV. 16. 17.) might also (a) in the several Ages and Generations raise up some distinguish'd Minds, who in some measure and by a secret Impulse became the *Preachers* and even Examples of Righteousness and Morality to a wretched World; that in this as well as the other they might be *without Excuse* (Romans I. 20.) as neither acknowledging *his Eternal Power and Goodness* from the Creation of the World, nor the *unchangeable Obligations* of Good and Evil from such Instances of it before their Eyes. Nevertheless allowing all this (which yet is more than a strict Rationalist will be ready to grant) without any Diminution from the brightest and most unsullied Character; what is it

(a) Seldenus meminit Joannis cujusdam Episcopi Euchaitensis, quod is Platonis & Plutarchi salutem Christo disertis precibus commendaverit, citante Tob. Pfannero Syst. Theol. Gent. Purioris. Cap. XXII. §. 4. pag. 494.

all to one general Scheme of Truth and Religion, or to a Reformation? What will this avail the Powers of natural Reason as sufficient to inform Mankind in the Rules of Virtue upon established Principles, *viz.* the Love of God and the sure hopes of a future Recompence? *Socrates* had a generous and manly Soul, who, upon some Intimations from *Archelaus* of the *Ionic* Sect, began to lay aside the dry and useless Pursuits after Natural Philosophy, and turned all his Endeavours to the Improvement of the *Athenians* in moral Virtues, and true Polity of Life; his Example was followed in part by his Successors, but under great Reserves, and a Caution very Partial to the receiv'd Theology, and the dread of *Hemlock*. If this be True (which is the account Antiquity furnishes us with) the best and obvious Remark from it is this, *viz.* That till that Time, none of their thinking Heads turn'd their Studies to Morality, or offered to teach it as a Science. To enquire into the Nature

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of the Soul of Man, to settle its Distinction from mere Matter, to urge its being Immaterial and Immortal, or some way or other surviving the Body after Death, to look further into a State of Pleasure or Pain, and from all these together, argue for the Practice of Virtue; to do this was by no means Agreeable to those mercenary Sophisters who set so high a Price upon their Instructions, nor to their Disciples, who would never pay too dear for what they neither understood nor cared for: *Socrates* had a better turn, and with a very few choice Spirits at last ventur'd upon a new Track; that is, this was not thought of till about the *Ninety fourth Olympiad*, not till about *four hundred Years* before the Birth of *Christ*, nor till after the total Captivity and Dispersion of the *Jewish* Nation, not 'till the last of the Prophets and the Completion of the *Canon* of the Old Testament by *Malachi*, and little more than one hundred Years before the Version of the *Septuagint* at the desire of
Ptolemy

Ptolemy Philadelphus. (If that was the first Translation from the *Hebrew* ; for (a) *Clemens Alexandrinus*, (who should know something of this Matter) seems to say there was one before the Times of *Alexander*.) We may perhaps have occasion to remark something by and by of this Period of Time. In the mean while let us return to *Socrates*. He had it seems from a Child (b) *something Divine*, a sort of *Voice* (usually call'd his *Genius*) which prevented him from doing many Things he designed, but never so much as once directed him in any Thing. This is his own Account or rather *Plato's* for him : it is a very difficult Matter to account for this sort of Intelligence and whether it was Supernatural or Peculiar to *Socrates* beyond the Rules and Discretion of

(a) Strom. l. 1. 288. Aristobulus (apud Eusebium Præp. Evang. XIII. 7.) asserit, jam ante Alexandri, imò Persarum imperium, quinque Mosis libros in Græcam linguam quamvis non adeò commode translatos fuisse. Citante Tobia Pfannero ubi supra. Cap. 1. §. 5. pag. 15. It is said by some that *Plato* read the Old Testament; if that be True, it argues something of a Translation before that of the 70. or else that he read it in the Original which must have been in *Judæa* it self.

(b) Θεῖόν τι ἐδαιμόνιον φωνή. *Plat. Apol.*

his own conscious Mind ; it may be sufficient for my present Purpose to observe that the Philosopher was fully perswaded all was Right, agreeable to Truth and Reason, and best for himself, whatever he did, when this extraordinary Circumstance of *Prohibition* did not interfere ; and this he gives for a Reason of his quiet Submission under his unjust Sentence, without making use of those Methods his Friends had concerted for his Escape ; and yet his Reason and his *Genius* too left him undisturbed in the Profession and Practice of avow'd Idolatry to the last, as they had before in the breach of at least one branch of moral Property very Remarkable ; which therefore according to his standing Rule of distinguishing, *Socrates* must conclude to be as Reasonable and fit to be done as any other Action of Life, where the same Voice, by not interposing left him to himself, and the Conduct of his own Judgment : I would not be thought by this to derogate from the Merit of this venerable Character ;

Character ; I have chose it as the brightest and least Corrupt in all *Pagan* Antiquity, and shall leave it with this Reflection, *viz.* If natural Reason assisted by some unaccountable Intelligence or Voice (call it what you please) either could not or (which is the same to our Point) would not inform *Socrates* himself in Truths of so great Importance as the Being of one God, and his Worship ; if he was wavering and uncertain as to his hopes of a future State, even just before his drinking the fatal Cup, as (a) at the best but a fair Chance ; if his Morality was very Faulty in many Points, it will be in Vain to look for any Thing of this Nature less Irregular among those that went before him, or came after him ; who as they little pretended to his *Genius*, did inherit less of his Sincerity and Resolution.

(a) Καλὸς ὁ κίνδυνος. καλὸν τὸ αἶθρον, καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς μεγάλη.

XXVII.

It may seem perhaps upon the first Thought a generous Attempt to assert the natural Sufficiency of human Reason in matters of Religion and Morality; and yet I should imagin it to be worth while for our modern Undertakers to consider, whether all this Bustle be not a sort of false Play, an Imposition both upon themselves and others. For before they can present us with such an Essay, it is necessary for them, either to take their Pattern from the first Ages of the World, when every Thought was the Result of pure unassisted Reason without any Hints or traditionary Testimonies from Revelation; or now at least, if they think better of their own Abilities, they should be Impartial and well assured of their own natural Reason, that it acts within the Limits of its due Province, and borrows nothing from that Revelation they either despise or think Unnecessary.

cessary. Till they have done both or but one of these Things, they should, methinks, be Content to leave us in the Quiet and acknowledged Possession of those Advantages we enjoy by the *Revelation of both Testaments*; but how can any Man propose to do either of these to any Satisfaction? To give us nothing but a prophane Ridicule in Exchange, is really Inhuman, and to bring in that for a Reason or Argument against Revelation, which Revelation it self furnishes them with, is really Ingratefull. Let them extoll the antient Moralists as much as they please, and (a) collect from thence as fair and ample a Scheme of what is *usually* term'd natural Religion as their Wit and Industry can suggest; and yet they will pardon us, I hope, (supposing this almost (b) impossible Thing could be done) if we should still affirm, all would be Insignificant, unless they could

(a) — Τὰ παρ' ἐκείνη τῶν αἰρέσεων, τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λέγων, ἀδιάβλητα δόγματα μετὰ τῶν ὁμολογούμενων βίη εἰς μίαν ἀβροειδέντι ἐκλογῇ. *Cl. Alex. Strom.* l. 6. pag. 463.

(b) *Lactantius* thought it so.

prove

prove two more Things as Difficult as
 any of the rest, *viz.* that the World e-
 ver was in some Parts or Instances of it
 without a Revelation, or, supposing it
 never was without one, yet that the Hea-
 thens had no Advantages from it. These
 are Facts which, whether True or False,
 must appear from the authentic Accounts
 of Antiquity. Against the *first*, the *mere*
 History of the Old Testament, undoubt-
 edly the most Antient in the World, is
 of sufficient Authority; against the *se-*
cond, what has been so often said by many
 Learned Persons of all Ages and almost
 Professions, not only of the Progress of
 Letters, Arts and Sciences from *Chaldæa*,
Phœnicia, and *Egypt*; and through all
 these from the *Hebrews* to *Greece*; but
 also the plain and visible Relation, many
 parts of *Pagan* Worship and Theology,
 much of their antient fable and Story,
 even to the retaining of Names; this
 Relation, I say, to those original Truths
 recorded by *Moses* and in the Books of
Joshua, *Judges*, &c. is an indisputable
 Memorial;

Memorial: and I must leave it to the Judgment of every impartial Mind to consider whether they who retained some Knowledge of the historical Truths of the Old Testament (whether by Tradition or any other way is not Material) could be absolutely unacquainted with the Moral and reveal'd, which have so great a Connection and Dependence upon one another; I confess both were miserably depraved, and corrupted from their first Purity, but this is a further Instance of the Weakness of natural Reason, and a necessity of Revelation.

XXVIII.

I have already observed that (a) *Socrates* was the Father of moral Philosophy among the *Greeks*, all before him turning their Studies wholly to Physics, *Archelaus* excepted, from whom *Socrates* received his first hints. *Archelaus*, no

(a) Πρώτος περί βίης διαλέχων.

Question,

Question, had looked better into it than those before him, and endeavoured to fix upon a Principle of Reflection beneficial to Mankind, and of firm Use in Life; and yet the best, it seems, his Reason could think of was, *viz.* (a) that right and wrong were determined not by *Nature* but *Law*, according as different Communities and Legislators should declare by positive Institutions, without Regard to any other Original. This has indeed much of the Politician in it with Regard to social and public Life, but very little of the Moralist. We have no great Reason to think any before him had better Notions than these, because none of them thought it worth much Study and Enquiry. Allowing therefore to *Socrates* his due Character, any one by reflecting upon the Time he lived in, and comparing it with those *Epocha's* and Transactions mentioned above, with the Consequences which must of Necess-

(a) Τὸ δίκαιον εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν οὐ φάσκει ἀλλὰ Νόμῳ. Diog. Laert. lib. 11. 11. 17. Vid etiam Bayle in Voce.

city attend them, will find it a Difficult Matter to imagin it possible for a Wise, inquisitive and considerate Heathen not to improve his common Notions from the *Mosaic* Law, the political State of the *Jews*, and in general, from the writings of the Old Testament. And this is the Use I would further make of that remarkable Instance of Time and Story hinted at a little above.

XXIX.

THE nearer we come down to the Times of the Incarnation, the greater still is this Probability. The Successors of *Alexander* the Great, in *Egypt* and the *East*, opened the ways of Communication by their continual Wars with one another; those parts of the World were then especially a Scene of continued Action, and *Judea* by an unhappy Situation, was, as it were the Partition between two great contending Powers, which kept them asunder, and accordingly felt either
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the Ravage or the false Friendship of both, and followed the Fortune of the Field: the number of the *Jews* settled at *Alexandria* (where they had Privileges equal to the most favoured Inhabitants,) is Notorious; so is the Translation of the Old Testament commonly called the *Septuagint*; and were not the Heathen Historians silent in the Affairs of that Nation even to contempt and Affectation, and themselves most wretched Historians, we should no doubt have heard of their Colonies and Commerce in *Asia* too. At last *Rome* swallowed up all, and brought from *Greece* and *Asia* with their Laurels, the Arts and Letters and Luxury of both. Philosophy till then was a mere Stranger there; that solemn People had hitherto lived as it were, upon common Notices, supported by a native Temperance, and Discipline truly *Roman*; and always happy in a Succession of great Men which never failed them from the Expulsion of their Kings: if there was any Thing that lookt like Enthusiasm, it

was the Love of their Country, and the Jealousy of their Arms. They had no *Lycæum* or *Academy*, no *Porticus* or *Garden*, to divert them from the Barr or the Field, which divided the Public pursuits of the whole Community. *These were their Arts*. When in Revenge for their Triumphs, *Asia* gave them Luxury, and *Greece* Philosophy. The latter pitches upon the Muse of *Lucretius* to debauch their stubborn Virtue, and soften them into *Epicures*; and when a little after, all the Jarring Systems of the several Sects come to be explained, set in Order, and argued by the greatest Wit and Capacity that *Rome* or all Antiquity could ever boast of, how in the very Principles of all, does his inimitable Pen conclude? He is lost in the Maze of his own different Reasonings, *Cotta* triumphs, and *Cicero* is little better than an Atheist: Reason was his Rule through the whole Enquiry, and whatever way he turned it, threw him upon sufficient Evidence to discover Mistake and unbecoming Absurdities,

furdities, but could go no further, there stopt, and left him in the Dark, disputing against all and believing none. Reason by her own Light could discover how far each Principle was False; but all the Light she had could never be able to fix upon any one that was true. And I should think that if that great Man could have found any Thing more Satisfactory than those nugatory Whimsies which there so well expose one another, he would assuredly have proposed it in a Work where he treats *ex professo* of the very first Foundations of all Philosophy and Morality; he would have abandoned his beloved *Academy*, and become a *Dogmatist*.

XXX.

NEVERTHELESS in the midst of this Jargon I very willingly own many great Instances of good Manners and political Virtue, especially among the *Romans* for the first four or five Centuries; but then
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this was by no means owing (as has been already hinted) to the Principles of common Philosophy, or any Thing that went by the name of Religion among them. The first was Unsound, and the last, like the Objects of their Adorations, abominable. It proceeded chiefly from the necessary Influence those Virtues had upon the Welfare of the State, and from that insatiable Love of Glory and Empire, all of them were possessed with. In short their Virtue was rather Political than Moral, and so far they were regarded by the over-ruling Providence of God; (a) had they not attained this extent of Empire and Glory, those good Arts by which they endeavoured to gain it, would have

(a) Si neque hanc ejus terrenam gloriam excelsissimi imperii concederet, non redderetur merces bonis artibus eorum, id est, virtutibus, quibus ad tantam gloriam pervenire nitebantur. Sic & isti privatas res suas pro re communi, hoc est, Republicâ & pro ejus ærario contempserunt, avaritiæ restiterunt. Consuluerunt patriæ consilio libero, neque delicto secundum suas leges, neque libidini obnoxii. His omnibus Artibus, tanquam verâ viâ, nisi sunt ad honores, imperium, gloriam; honorati sunt in omnibus ferè Gentibus, hodieque Literis & historiâ gloriosi sunt in omnibus Gentibus. Non est quod de summi & veri Dei Justitiâ conquerantur, *Perceperunt mercedem suam.* *Augustin.* Civit. Dei. lib. v. Cap. xv. He speaks of the Scævola, Curtii & Decii before. *This being a very fine Remark, I could not forbear inserting it at its full length.*

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failed

failed of their Reward. Thus they preferr'd the Public to all private Affairs, and chose to enrich the public Treasury rather than their own Coffers. They consulted the public Weal with a disinterested and impartial Freedom, and were equally carefull of offending against the Laws of the State and the rules of Temperance. By these Arts they strove for Honour, Empire and Glory, for this they are respected in all Nations, and are to this day Glorious in the Records of History and Learning ; they were mere Virtues of State, and as such *they had their Reward*. Add to these, if you think fit, some remains of Nature kept up in the several Ages of the World by the signal Providence of the great Creator, that there might not be an universal Stagnation of all Good in Practice and Principle both ; 'till about the time of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the World, having reached its utmost Maturity and made its last Advances, it became one considerable Branch of that known Expression

pression in Scripture ; *the fulness of Time.*

XXXI.

I cannot forbear observing one Thing more upon this Occasion, and that is concerning *Pythagoras*. He is generally said to be the first among the *Greeks*, who taught the Immortality of the Soul; this, with most of that Knowledge he was afterwards so Famous for, he brought with him in his return from the *East*, where he was the Scholar of *Zoroastres*, the first who taught this Doctrine among the Heathen. It has been a great Dispute among the Learned, who this *Zoroastres* was, and in what time he lived. But the Learned Dr. *Prideaux* has convincingly proved that he was at first a *Jew* both by Religion and Nation, (a) that he was a Servant of the Prophet *Daniel*, and learnt from that great Master

(a) Connection of Sacred and Prophane History, Part 1. Book 4. from pag. 212. to 230. Edit. 8vo.

all that Knowledge in Sacred and Prophanes Things, which afterwards he so effectually made Use of to establish his Imposture in the *Persian* Empire. *Pythagoras* acted the same Part in the *West*, and was a zealous Imitator of his Master in those Arts, which are proper to raise a greater Veneration from the People; but as one Impostor, though he borrows from another the Master-lines of his Project, allows himself however a liberty of Variation in little Articles, so also did *Pythagoras*. *Zoroastres* delivered the Doctrine of the Souls Immortality pure and unmixed as he received it from the *Jews*, *Pythagoras*, having no Notion of a separate Existence, turns it into a ridiculous Transmigration. He who first taught this Principle of Morality among the Heathen, was *Zoroastres* in the *East*, the first who brought it into *Greece* and *Italy* from thence was *Pythagoras*. Could he have been satisfied with teaching this important Truth as he found it, it would have been well. But that weak and

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treacherous Reason which was unable at first to discover this Truth, loads it with idle fabulous Absurdities, making the Soul an Eternal Vagrant through an everlasting variety of Body. Here I must refer the Curious and Inquisitive, (those especially to whom these Thoughts are chiefly addressed) to that incomparable Author mentioned above, not only for full Satisfaction in the curious Story of *Zoroastres*, but also in that surprizing Connection and Series of History through the whole. As it is deservedly esteemed the best Composition our Age has produced, and more in hand than any other Book whatsoever; so I cannot but persuade my self, that those Gentlemen (who by their Education and Capacity are best able to judge of that infinite Mass of Transactions there to be met with, ranged in so clean Order, such Perspicuity and chronological Exactness,) be they never such Enemies to Revelation, will find a Demonstration of the Truth and even Divinity of the Old Testament, not

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only

only from the many Prophecies, respecting different Ages and Nations, so exactly fulfilled, but from that very Connection of Sacred and Prophane Story, which is there so well laid together. But to return from this, I hope, not unnecessary Digression.

XXXII.

It appears from these short Hints no easy Matter to determin how far natural Reason can proceed in the discovery even of moral Truth; because no Man can tell how far Reason has had the Assistance of Revelation in it. And therefore a very Learned Author has observed upon this Subject, that *(a) though it be generally supposed that human Reason could discover the more common and obvious Principles of Morality contained in the Scripture, yet it is more probable that it could not have discovered most of them, if we may*

(a) Dr. Jenkins, &c.

judge by the gross Absurdities to be found in the best Systems of heathen Philosophy. They are Notorious not only in the Practice of the most civilized and polite Nations, but in their most famous Law-givers. Even those Moralists, who lived somewhat after the Incarnation, are tainted with it; and yet it is certain that then they began to review their Plans, and were instructed from the Doctrines and Converse of the first Christians (for it is Impossible they could be unacquainted either with the Persons of many of them, or with what they so regularly taught and lived) to speak at least, and dictate more consistently in many Points out of a conscious Jealousy of their own Weakness, and the others Excellencies so far above them; and thus by a preposterous Disingenuity borrowed from the Christian to continue Pagans and Idolaters with a better Grace. *Seneca* is often *Splendidè mendax*. *Abundat dulcibus vitiis* is as just a Criticism upon his Morals as his Style. *Antoninus*, *Plutarc*, and *Epiet*

tus have a like Judgment passed upon them by many Learned and good Men, who yet studied them not to expose their Blemishes ; but they are too Remarkable to a Christian's Eye, to be unobserved even in running : and to say no more, all in General who were any thing Famous either for a *Laconic* sententious Morality such as *Epiſtetus*, *Antoninus* and others much more Antient, or for composing regular Treatises such as *Cicero*, *Seneca* and *Plutarc*, were still open, profest and zealous Idolaters, the Leaders of the common Herd of Pagans. The whole Sect of the *Stoics* (the most Illustrious of all Antiquity) approved of Self-murder in many Instances. Insomuch that it would be Excusable to suspect, that licentious Wits took their first occasion from hence to say, that Religion was only the Politician's Tool, a state Engine to which moral Laws and Distinctions became only a variable Appendix, not so much to be directed from Reasons of Nature, as the more urgent Reasons of State. Such gross
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and abominable Polytheism being only Proper to make the inquisitive Infidels, and the ignorant Superstitious.

XXXIII.

THE Doctrine of one Supreme, Infinitely Perfect and Good Being is the (a) Principle and Foundation of all moral Truth. If human Reason was unable of it self to discover many of the *more common and obvious Principles*, it was still less able to discover with any certainty, that upon which those common Principles depend. The best way to determine whether this be so or not, is by Appeal to fact and Experience; these are to be brought from Pagan Antiquity, and in strictness cannot indeed be brought from any Thing else. Thither I have appealed, and that says, human Reason could do neither to any manner of Regularity or Satisfaction.

(a) The first Commandment.

XXXIV.

XXXIV.

BUT it may further be said, that several very Learned Men have now at last given us the *Principles and Delineations of the Religion of Nature*, with great Perspicuity and a sort of Geometrical Exactness, and especially the late Mr. *Wollaston*. As farr as this may concern the present Subject, I beg leave to offer a few Considerations.

FIRST, the chief Design of these Authors is to show the practical Libertine and Debauchee how much he acts below the Dignity of his Species, and the Idea's of Reason in a Riot of Sensuality and Injustice, wherein he confounds himself and that necessary Relation he bears to Truth, and the World of Beings that are about him.

SECONDLY, in all their Process of Argument they still pay their deference to Revelation, and acknowledge its Superiority; and would only by this natural Method

thod and a Train of Arguments properly *ad Hominem* invite him first to the Reason of a Man, and then to the Religion of a Christian. Their Schemes are by no means urged either as sufficient of themselves, or opposite to the Christian Dispensation, but wholly Subservient to that. The last mentioned Author in particular, lays this down as the *great Law of Nature*, or *natural Religion*, or rather of the *Author of Nature*, viz. that every intelligent Active and free Being (such as he has proved Man to be) should so behave himself as by no Act to contradict Truth; or that he should treat every Thing as being what it is. (See Sect. 1. Prop. XI.) That to act according to right Reason, and according to Truth are in effect the same Thing. (Sect. 3. Prop. x.) Afterwards, and in Consequence of these Propositions (when he has given us a beautifull Train of Arguments to prove the Immortality of the Soul in a strength of Reason and Philosophic Eloquence scarce to be equalled in all Antiquity, and with

with a πάθος and Energy so truly Christian, that it breaks out and shines even in this strict αὐτοδίδακτος Philosopher) being very sensible how much he wants a Guide; he obviates the least Prejudice that might be taken from his *Delineation* to any other true Religion, by giving this Remark once for all, viz. *whatsoever is immediately revealed from God, must, as well as any Thing else, be treated as being what it is: which cannot be, if it is not treated with the highest Regard, believed and obeyed.* Sect. IX. Prop. VIII. pag. 211.) and I will venture to say, that those two Words *believed* and *obeyed* are absolutely out of any natural Scheme or *Delineation* whatever.

THIRDLY, as they acknowledge the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Dispensation, so also do they write (more than *Plutarc* or *Seneca* could possibly do) under the Benefits of that Dispensation in plain moral Truths and *Delineations* of *Nature*; for it is a Mistake to think that Revelation has always for its Subject things

things Incomprehensible; the very Word it self in a critical View carries not that Idea with it, but is rather any Knowledge extraordinarily communicated to any by God: moral Truths in their own Nature not only may be, but really are the proper Subject of Revelation as it contains a body of divine Laws and Instructions for Man's observance. And therefore a very Learned Author (a) above cited who has treated of this Subject with great variety of Learning and Exactness, has observed, ' that Things ' once discovered seem Obvious and ' easy, which Man would never have ' discovered of himself; and this is especially the Case of moral Truths, ' which are so agreeable to Reason, that ' they may seem the natural Productions ' of it, though a contrary Custom and ' Inclination and the Subtilty of *Satan* ' working upon a depraved Nature, might ' perhaps have made it Difficult, if not

(a) *Jenkins* ubi supra. the Reasonableness and certainty of the Christian Religion, Part 1. pag. 423.

Impossible to discover many of those which are now the most common and familiar to us.

FOURTHLY, however it may be disputed or allowed that the Light of natural Reason may lead a Man to confess a God, I think (a) no Light of Nature extends so far as to declare the Will and true Worship of that God; so far therefore as the Will of God and his true Worship are a part of Morality (and they are no doubt a very great part of it) so far must they be the Subject of Revelation. You may, if you please, comprehend them within the *Delineations* of natural Religion, and the compass of Reason; but then let it be so, not so much because mere Reason could originally make the Discovery, but because after the Discovery by Revelation, the same Reason acknowledges them to be agreeable to it self, this, as it makes it *acceptable to God*, making it also *a reasonable Service*. Rom. XII. 1.

(a) L. Bacon's Advancement of human Learning lib. 3. cap. 7.

FIFTHLY, I don't know whether any one, who denies the Necessity of Revelation, has ever ventured to present the World with any *moral* Scheme of his own in order to rectify or fill up what he finds amiss, superfluous or wanting in the Gospel of *Christ*, or *in Fact* pretend to the least Equality. As high as they carry their own Conceits, in this they dare not appeal to others, where the Reason of every plain honest understanding Christian will expose them as wretched *Plagiaries* or impious vile Cavillers. What others, and especially Bishop *Wilkins*, and that very Learned Gentleman Mr. *Wollaston*, have obliged the World with concerning the *Principles and Delineations of natural Religion*, they have nothing to do with, but upon such Terms as they will very hardly comply with. They must with them acknowledge the Advantages and Superiority of revealed Religion even in moral Truths; they must with them (and which would, I am afraid, be of much harder Digestion) acknowledge

knowledge also many other revealed Truths, which without a Revelation could never have enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive, and after Revelation are properly Myfterious and Incomprehenfible. This would bring in a *Trinity of Persons in the Godhead*, the *Hypoftatic Union*, the *Satisfaction of Chrift*, the *Refurrection of the same Body*, and the *final Judgment of the World by the Man Chrift Jefus*; but this would be to captivate their Understanding to the dominion of Faith, to be led in Triumph and to believe in God; a hard faying! and how can Reason, that bufy *Disputer of this World*, bear that?

SIXTHLY, I defire this alfo may be confidered which Mr *Wollafton* fays, (Sect. III. pag. 59.) concerning the principal Caufes of Error: the firft of which is *want of Faculties*, when Men pretend to judge of Things above them, and others deny what there is the *highest Reason* to believe, only because they cannot comprehend it. This is undoubtedly a fource of Er-

ror which appears more or less in all Instances of Life and Degrees of human Capacity ; it is a Composition of Pride and Obstinacy, built upon the Ruins of fallen Nature, and Man's first Innocence : it contradicts every Truth, and *treats nothing as being what it is*, and therefore becomes really Unnatural in matters of plain Fact and Speculation also : how then can that which is a Principle of so much Error in every Thing, be depended upon as a Rule in any Thing ? Surely the same conscious Modesty which assures every Man (a) *how hardly he guesses aright at Things that are upon Earth, and with Labour finds the Things that are before him*, may convince him, that the Things that are in Heaven, none can search out, or (b) *know the Counsel of God, except he give Wisdom, and send his Holy Spirit from above.*

LASTLY, I cannot persuade my self but there is something Suspicious (more

(a) Wisdom Cap. ix. v. 16, 17.

(b) Σαφὴς ἑλεγχος ἀπιστίας τὸ πῶς ; περὶ Θεοῦ λέγειν. J. Mart. de Rect. Confess.

than has yet been mentioned) in this great Deference which so many pay to what is termed *natural Religion*. This Respect then is either *Real* or *Counterfeit*; if *Real*, they would do well to find out one Injunction in *Christ's Religion* disagreeable to any Principle in Nature: Since one is allowed by them to be Good, why must the other be rejected because 'tis better? Why, since they acknowledge their Duty as Men, in *the pursuit of Happiness by the Practice of Reason and Truth*, will they distinguish upon us and deny it as Christians, although the latter is all the Good of the former, abstracted from all its Evil and Imperfections, enlarged with greater Advantages and full certainty? Has not *loving of Enemies* more Humanity in it, than *allowed Revenge*, the *exposing of Infants*, and *human Sacrifices to Devils*? Is Self-denial so much applauded in a few Morose vain *Stoics* or in a beastly *Cynic*, and must it lose the Name of Virtue when practised upon

upon Principles *Christian* and Divine? Are there no Graces in Humility, and that Meekness of Heart which the Heathen understood so little of, that what they call by that Name is a Vice rather than a Virtue? Or is there nothing in the Comforts and Necessity of Evangelical Repentance, the very first Word of *Christ's* and his Apostles preaching? A Duty so little known, understood, or practised among the Heathen in any religious Sense, that (a) one of the most learned Men of this Age, and of prodigious Reading, has observed somewhere that he cannot remember an Instance in Antiquity of any one recommending himself to the Favour of the Gods upon his Death-bed by Confession and Repentance, or asking Pardon for his Sins. In short, let them ask themselves, if they are in earnest, whether supposing the Religion of *Christ* in its Circle of Virtues human, Social and Divine, to be larger and more Compleat than any other, whether, I say,

(a) Mr. Bayle in voce Zia or Zea.

the Example and Authority of the Law-giver, the force and Efficacy of Divine Love, the strength of Faith, an assured Hope, and the Assistance of the Holy Spirit of God are not sufficient to give the Preference in our choice first, and from thence in our Obedience.

BUT if they are in Jest, and what they call natural Religion, is just what they please in every Case and Occasion, if, as (a) *in those Days when there was no King in Israel, they choose every Man to do that which is Right in his own Eyes,* and to live without God in the World, as in the Case of Mysteries we cannot allow them so refined a Taste as to be the fixt Standard of common Reason, neither can we in *this* give them any great Pretences to common Prudence and Civility; they must be left to the Charity of that Religion they despise, and the Contempt of that Reason they so wretchedly boast of.

(a) Judges xxi. 25.

I HAVE now brought the Argument as far as I designed, without applying it to particular Debates or controverted Points among us. That must be left to abler Heads and more willing Minds, or to the Thoughts of those who may have the Patience to run over this short Essay, which must of Necessity suggest some; and I had much rather they should come in from a general Consideration of what is now offered, than any further Designation of my own. A very small Acquaintance with Men and Letters (such as I can but scarce pretend to) and the usual Topics of Discourse running too much this way, are a sufficient Apology for any one if he endeavours to form something in the view of Reason and Nature for his own private Satisfaction, and by which he may vindicate that Faith which he professes against those whose delight is to attack it this way. This I have attempted in a sort of Historical Abstract, the

the best way to convince a sincere inquisitive Mind, what Impotent and frail creatures Men are. This is a Glass in which every one may behold his *natural Face* without Flattery, and with so much Force, that it must be hard for him to *forget what manner of Man he is*. He will find in the Circle of this lower System, this Court of the *Gentiles*, a variety sufficient not only to try his Strength, but baffle and confound it, without invading the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, the *Adyta* of the most high God in the complicated Mystery of Man's Redemption; for this Mystery it will remain maugre all the efforts of Reason either in explaining or disputing it away. It can be no Disparagement to the best human Capacity to know its own Limits, to act and think under a possibility of Mistake in many Things, and an utter Ignorance in more. Moral Evil and its Consequences are a *Mystery of Iniquity* which each Man's Experience too much informs him of; but as no Man's Reason could, I think, ever satisfy

satisfy him without a Revelation how it
 came first into the World, consistent
 with infinite Goodness, neither could the
 joint Powers of Reason and all created
 Nature ever have made or so much as
 thought of a proper Satisfaction for it
 consistent with infinite Justice. This is
 that *Grace and Truth* which alone came
 by *Jesus Christ*, and which *the Angels de-*
sire to look into, but cannot comprehend.
 Surely then Man, a passionate, Low, em-
 bodied Spirit, for whose sake alone all
this Labour of Love is, and these Won-
 ders are prepared, should pay so much
 deference to the Declarations of infinite
 Wisdom and Goodness, as to esteem that
 the best in Practice and most reasonable
 in Belief, which comes recommended to
 him by clear Revelation and divine Au-
 thority; such as will repair the Ruins of
 his Fall, and instruct him to know God
 and himself as he ought; such as will
 give him so much Gratitude and Humi-
 lity as to be thankfull for those adorable
 Scenes of Mercy he has open'd to us,
 and

and content to stop a vain Curiosity where God has closed the Prospect; for it is as easy to make Shipwrack of a sound Faith by pretending to know too much, as of a good Conscience by practising too little. Every Christian has Understanding sufficient for his Happiness and Salvation, if (a) *Christ dwells in his Heart by Faith*, and may be able to comprehend *with all Saints, what is the Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and Height, and know the Love of Christ, which passeth Knowledge*, if he is first rooted and grounded in Love; the Love of God who sent his Son to dye for us. In this Contemplation all Distinctions of human Capacity and Strength of Parts are useless, they are swallowed up in the *fulness of God*; and in that Respect are like the *Manna* in the Wilderness, where (b) *he that gathered much, had nothing over, and he that gathered little, had no lack*. (c) *Where then is the Wise, where is the Scribe, where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not*

—(a) Ephes. III. 17, 18, 19. (b) Exod. XVI. 18. (c) 1 Cor. I. 20, 21.

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 20, 21.
 God

God made Foolish the Wisdom of this World?
 Hath he not plainly manifested that the
 World by all its Wisdom did not ob-
 tain a sufficient Knowledge of the true
 God, by the light of Nature? Is not
 this saving Knowledge given to Faith?
 What can be plainer than these Words
 of St. Paul? *After that in the Wisdom of*
God (the Works of his Creation and
Providence) the World by Wisdom knew
not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of
Preaching to save them that believe: (a)
 God resolving in Christ to bring Man-
 kind to their last Happiness by Faith,
 and not by Knowledge, that so the
 weakest among Men may have their
 way to Blessedness open. And certain-
 ly it is that many weak Men believe
 themselves into Heaven, and many over-
 knowing Christians lose their Way
 thither, while they will believe no
 more than they can clearly know.
 And this is it, (b) as the same Lear-

(a) *Laud against Fisher.* pag. 106.

(b) *Laud ubi supra* pag. 111.

ned *Prelate* argues, with Respect to the
 Principles of natural Knowledge and
 Christian Faith) which makes the very
 entrance into Divinity inaccessible to
 those Men, who standing high in the
 Opinion of their own Wisdom, will
 believe nothing, but that which is ir-
 refragably proved from rational Princi-
 ples. For as *Christ* requires a *Denial* of
 a *Man's self*; that he may be able to fol-
 low him; so as great a part as any of
 this Denial of his whole-self (for so it
 must be) is the Denial of his Under-
 standing, and the composing of the
 unquiet search of this *Grand Inquisitor*
 into the Secrets of him that made it,
 and the overruling the doubtfulness
 of it by the Fervency of the Will.
Ut ipsâ fide valentiores facti, quod credi-
mus intelligere mereamur.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

Pag. 7. l. 13. for *Accountable* r. *Unaccountable*, pag. 24. l. 10.
 for *neither*, r. *either*.

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